

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE: PROVIDING A LOCAL EMPLOYMENT CLEARINGHOUSE

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Employment services involve an array of human development activities. However, the primary function is to facilitate the job clearing process, that is employer-job applicant contact. Any local organization with adequate resources may act as a local employment clearinghouse by providing a liaison between a potential employer and the job seeker. A successful employment clearinghouse must aggressively perform both job development and job placement.

Need for a Local Clearinghouse

An essential ingredient in a market system, is the ability of each market to "clear" itself. Buyers and sellers must communicate their needs and desires to exchange goods and services in order to negotiate mutually acceptable transactions. Without communication, a market system could not exist. While much emphasis has been placed upon the operation of commodity markets, it is frequently assumed, particularly at the local level, that the labor market will, with little assistance, "clear" itself.

State and private employment services generally are located in metropolitan areas where greater portions of the labor force reside. Rural employers and job seekers find it difficult to access these metropolitan services. Increased costs resulting from long distances and time expended may preclude the use of these services. In other cases, lack of awareness of services and the institutionalized performance of these services may preclude usage by the rural sector. (Rural communities may discover that existing agencies cannot deliver the quality of services expected because of institutional

practices. Performance expectations of rural individuals often center upon atmosphere, for example, warmth, friendliness, informality and personal attention rather than upon administrative accuracy. These performance expectations may necessitate input by local citizens.)

Both employers and job seekers in rural areas may find it difficult to communicate their needs and desires without a local employment clearinghouse. Economic consequences of a lag in employment result in lost profits and wages to firms and individuals and an eroded economic base in the community. Social consequences to heads of households and other individuals being unemployed are well documented. Any community leader viewing the difficulties of an employer finding suitable employees would not welcome the resultant stagnation. While an identifiable local employment clearinghouse cannot guarantee that such consequences will not occur, it may provide answers and assistance to those in search of a job. In addition, it may be a source of psychological comfort which is often instrumental in determining residency for both the employer and employee. Community leaders may view the need for a local clearinghouse as part of supportive services to local business or industrial development efforts. In any case, the maintenance of the dignity of employment is sufficient cause to examine current labor market practices and support the establishment of a visible local employment clearinghouse.

The local employment clearinghouse provides the employer and job seeker several benefits including:

1. Reduced information cost by providing a local source to both,
2. Potential understanding and encouragement during the job search and

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3. Evidence of a community concern for the economic well-being of its citizens.

It provides community leaders an opportunity to design a delivery system capable of meeting the unique requirements of their community.

Establishment of an Employment Service

An employment service will require at least one individual to assist in the clearinghouse process; preferably a private office for consulting with and interviewing job applicants; appropriate forms and office supplies; and a telephone. Funding of the employment clearinghouse is possible through a variety of ways depending upon the level of services to be provided and available resources. A non-profit or break-even operation may be funded through donations, local contributions or existing federal or state manpower programs. Local civic groups and county and city governments may provide office space and contribute to other overhead expenses. (Fee assessment upon employer or employees may provide additional funds, although this may necessitate the alteration of the profit status of the organization.) Organization, training assistance and employment forms may be available through the Texas Employment Commission, the federal and state manpower coordinators and the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

Procedures and Techniques

To accomplish both job development and job placement functions, clearinghouse personnel must identify, contact and enlist both employers and job seekers. By adopting marketing and sales techniques utilized by successful sales organizations, a professional employment service can be organized. Employment personnel may divide the work day between job development (employers) and job placement (applicants). A routine of mornings devoted to contacting employers and afternoons devoted to interviewing of job applicants has proven successful in employment clearinghouses.

Essentially "problem solvers," the employment personnel must be able to convey benefits and advantages of the service to both the potential employer and the job applicant. Once this ability has been developed, a systematic procedure for contacting both parties will complete the essentials for a successful employment clearinghouse.

Contacting Employers and Job Development

The employment personnel must become acquainted with existing and potential employers, and familiar with the general economy of the area.

A canvas of the entire community should be conducted *as soon as possible* by the employment personnel. Before these employer visits, a proposed route should be examined and the nature of the information to be gathered should be determined.

Job order forms may be developed to record the following information:

1. Business identification, including the individual in charge of hiring personnel,
2. Number of employees,
3. Number of vacancies,
4. Nature of the business and skills required by employees,
5. Number of personnel to be hired in the near future and
6. Any employment difficulties encountered by the employer.

The job order form or a summary of vacancies may be filed by date of anticipated vacancy for future reference. Any leads obtained during the job development process must be followed up.

Much of the success of the employment service depends upon employer awareness of the available service. Such usual medias as press releases, radio programs and informational brochures can be supplemented by fact sheets which can be supplied to each employer upon initial contact. Advertisements may be placed in local newspapers indicating the availability of the service and requesting the pertinent information be mailed to the employment service.

Mere contact of the employer does not guarantee the success of the employment clearinghouse. The successful employment service must sell itself, ideas and services. Preparation is the key to successful interviewing, and references should be readily available in local libraries which discuss proper interviewing techniques.

Interviewing Job Applicants and Job Placement

To assist job applicants in their search for suitable employment, job application forms are needed to record personal information, employment history and other relevant information about the individual. (It is suggested that the employment service be a referral system and, as such, maintain all records in confidentiality.) The employment personnel may also wish to record the course of action suggested to the job applicant and all contacts with and for applicants. This will allow the employment service to assess its success in the job placement effort.

Employment personnel should discuss alternatives for the job applicant. Each job applicant should be encouraged to register with the state employment agency and utilize its professional counseling services.

The employment personnel should discuss with job applicants procedures which may assist in the job search; for example, proper interviewing and application procedures.

As with the employer, the success of the employment clearinghouse depends upon public awareness of the available service. In addition to the advertising methods mentioned posters can be placed in areas of high people traffic and presentations can be made to explain manpower programs to civic groups, as well as county and city officials. (Ultimately, a newsletter or radio program may be developed to outline relevant legislation as well as local programs, and to indicate vacancies or occupancy skills available.)

While records and paper work should be minimized, a simple cross reference file to maintain multiple classifications of job applicants is necessary. Once a vacancy has been identified, employment personnel should coordinate this information with skills indicated by job applicants. Alertness to all sources of information can lead to effective job placement. Job banks, if any other agencies maintain such, should be accessed. The traditional sources of job vacancies include newspapers, radio and television advertisements, but the creative local employment personnel will be alert to marriage announcements, military inductions, retirement announcements, new contracts or busi-

ness expansion notices which provide leads to potential vacancies. Telephone directories, professional lists and other employers provide additional sources of information pertaining to potential employment. Some of the records developed by the employment clearinghouse, itself, can be translated into job placement information.

Supportive Services

In addition to job development and placement functions, the employment clearinghouse personnel should become familiar with existing vocational training programs and the guidelines for the establishment of new programs. Federal, state and local supportive services to assist the employer and job seeker such as industrial start-up training and on-the-job training, should be investigated thoroughly. These may include counseling for personal problems and income maintenance programs including drug and alcohol abuse, welfare requirements, mental health counseling and vocational rehabilitation.

Outreach Program

Once a local employment clearinghouse becomes visible to the entire community, it may serve as a catalyst to the development of other manpower programs such as manpower inventories for industrial development efforts, job readiness clinics or summer youth employment services. The successful local clearinghouse may become the center of the local labor market. As such, it must strive to meet the needs of all its clients — employers and job seekers.

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